

Causation in History - The Reason Behind All Happenings: A Critical Evaluation.

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ABSTRACT: In this paper the relevance of Causation in the theory of History is analyzed. The various aspects on the questioning and the methodology involved in the causation theory are viewed. The sublime theories associated with the topic are discussed and the ethics that a historian should follow while interpreting history with regards to the cause involved is put into consideration at this context. The outcome of an event's cause with regard to the ethical explanation inculcating the various aspects of value judgement of causation is discussed.

KEY WORDS : Cause, Occurrence, Analytical outlook, Pluralistic, Marxian, Nationalist,

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I. INTRODUCTION

As Plato said "Everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause, for nothing can come to be without a cause" (Carr, 1990). There can be no event much there than a historical event which can happen without a cause and each cause in turn will have some effects as well. For a very long time historians simply discussed the course of events as these took place.

Eg: Where and when the battles were fought?

How many persons were killed?

How the armies were organized? and so on.

In the earlier times they did not bother about the causes and effects of the events as they thought it was interference in the will of God. Even the great historian Thucydides does not seek to the deeper causes of the Peloponnesian war after the defeat of the Athens. "Happy is he who knows the causes of things" (Commager, 2015) but if it is considered so then it is considered that the historians who find the causes are happy which is not actually so. Then no self respecting modern historian is content merely with the recording of what happened: in fact he wants to explain its causes for its occurrence. Of all problems of history, causation is the most urgent and the most fascinating and the most baffling (Commager, 2015). The term 'Cause' is originated from the Latin word "Causa" which means a relation or connection between two events. Thus cause is linked with a connection with something which can be simple or complex. E H Carr quotes in his book "What is History" that "Even Thucydides has been accused of having no clear conception of causation" (Carr, 1990). But as the time is passing with that analytical outlook is also developing in history giving importance to the cause as essential and the historians are paying more and more attention to the causes of the events because it works as a useful guide for future action (Khurana, 2010). Every historian is anxious to know the causes of the things and they are not merely content with what happened, but they want to explain why it happened (Jayapalan, 2008). How it took place and also whether it could or could not be avoided. Even Saint Augustine in his book "City of God" used history for illustrating the plan and purpose of God. According to him history was nothing but the story of the great struggle between the city of God and the City of Satans' in which the God would ultimately win (Jayapalan, 2008). Though is a value based question and views can radically differ on these, yet what is important is the approach which is developing in history ie, the desire to know the cause. The immediate cause usually starts the chain of events and precipitates the crisis (Majumdar *et al.*, 2001). Historical causation is an attempt in history to trace current and historical events to their root causes.

S W Alexander says "Determinism means that the data being what they are, what ever happens definitely and could not be different. To hold that it could mean only if the data were different" (Khurana, 2010).

For over two thousand years historians and philosophers had been trying to find out the answers to these simple questions about the course of history but a change and development in the nature of enquiry in an independent and open way only sprouted in the last two or three centuries. Historians and philosophers of history began to find out the causes of historical events- "Sometimes the causes and the laws were thought of in mechanical, sometimes in biological terms, sometimes in metaphysical, sometimes as economical and

sometimes as psychological (Jayapalan, 2008).” For instance Philosopher Bertrand Russell, traced the cause of the industrialisation back through the European Renaissance, to the fall of Constantinople, the invasion of the Turks and finally to social disintegration in the Central Asia. Thus the historical Causation tries to find an explanation for the changes and is often also used to predict events by forecasting the effects of current events on future situations. Thus we can consider that Causality in History is indefinitely complex as it evades scientific investigation and comes closer to philosophy where a hypothesis is done in the answer (Sheik, 2001).

In the beginning the historians described the course of events and the happenings and neither concerned to think about the causes of the events. Consequently they never thought about the cause of the happenings (Khurana, 2010). At the present historical scenario, the historians are giving their views based on value judgements, by which the causes usually differ, though the approach holds an important role.

Gottschalk rightly remarks that it has been likened by “Dropping of a match in a combustible pile or the slipping of a hammer on an explosive” (Gustavson, 1955). It is seen that why historians give importance on the immediate cause.

APPROACHES TO CAUSATION - AN EXPLANATION.

Some people speak of causality as inner logic of events or even reject the causal approach in favor of the functional approach thus leading us to the question of how it happened. Then comes the multiplicity of the causation. Multiple causes are linked to a single main cause – in short a random jumble of economic, political, ideological, and personal causes of long term and short term causes (Carr, 1990). A true historian confronted with a list of all the causes of his own compiling, would feel a professional compulsion to reduce it to order, to establish some hierarchy of causes which would fix their relation to one another. Thus a historian is known by his invoked causes. Every historical argument revolves round the question of the priority of causes (Carr, 1990). The historian by his deep and wide research constantly goes nearer to the question of Why. Another approach is the fact that historian must work through the simplification as well as the multiplication of the causes. But the historian in virtue of his urge to understand the past, is simultaneously compelled, like the scientist, to simplify the multiplicity of his answers, to subordinate one answer to another, and to introduce some order and unity into the chaos of happenings and the chaos of specific causes (Carr, 1990). History like science advances through this dual and apparently contradictory process.

If a cause is simple it is easy to find out. If it's a complex one then it needs investigation and patience to find that out (Khurana, 2010).

The cause of an event can be immediate and non immediate, even though both are linked to each other. For example let's take the case of a war between two nations or communities may break over a trifle and this may be its immediate cause, but it is bound to have its link with some happenings which might have created some grooves, grudges, misunderstandings, feelings on revenge long back. Either the parties for one reason or the other might be tolerating that, but finding an opportunity; these come out to settle the old scores. This is what that always happens in case of wars, revolutions and riots.

Does History repeat itself?

No doubt in science experiments can be repeated but the past experiences in history cannot be repeated. The reason is that a historical event is unique. Historical situations involve human beings and each being's habit, thinking and outlook may be entirely different. A superficial observer with a little historical sense may say that the Russian revolution was the repetition of the French Revolution or that the Second World War was that of the first. There can be occurrence of similar situation but not identical situation (Jayapalan, 2008). We find in history that a few situations have the very similar circumstances. For instance in the history of India, we notice that after the death of King Louis XIV, weak and inefficient rulers occupied the

throne. This is the very same case in the history of India we notice after the exit of the Aurangzeb and Bhadurshah. Therefore it may be said that history not only does not repeats itself but even cannot repeat to itself. E H Carr says in his book "What is History" "that "One reason why history rarely repeats itself among historically conscious people is that the dramatist personae are aware at the second performance of the denouncement of the first and their action is affected by that knowledge". The fact is that all human actions are free and determined and these are all based on the point of view one considers them.

II. CAUSES OF EVENTS IN HISTORY

As E H Carr opinions "Every historical argument revolves round the question of the priority of causes". It is interesting to see how the historians are making use of the causes. First they will commonly assign the causes to the same events, thus they deal with multiple causes by reducing them into order. 'Determination in History' and 'Chance in History' are the two reasons closely attached to the causes of events in history. The other source of attack is the famous cause of 'Cleopatra's Nose'. E H Carr adds that he hopes that, uncontroversially - as the belief that everything that happens has a cause or causes, and could not have happened

differently unless something in the cause or causes had also been different. Determinism is a problem not of history, but of all human behaviour. The human being whose actions have no cause and are therefore undetermined is as much an abstraction as the individual outside society (Carr, 1990). From this it is clear that the sequences of cause and the effects are clashing with each other. It is the duty of the historian to select and marshal the facts. Not all facts are historical facts. A similar process can be applied to the historian's approaches to the causes. This will lead to the clue of accidental in history. Thus the shape of Cleopatra's nose was an accident which modified the course of history. The problem of causation is inextricably connected with the whole question of movement and change in history, and some facility in dealing with it is indispensable for an understanding of the course of events (Gustavson, 1955).

"A cause is a convenient figure of speech for any one of a number of factors which helps to explain why a historical event happened"

But the fact remains that the historian must work through the simplification, as well as through the multiplication, of causes. History like science advances through this dual and apparently contradictory process (Gustavson, 1955).

There is no precise rule that tells the historians where to stop in tracking the causes of any historical event. But there is what we might call a principle of diminishing relevance: it is that the greater the time that separates a cause from the consequence, the less relevant we presume that cause to be (John, 2002).

Immediate Cause and Non Immediate Cause

The cause which resorts in the outbreak of the war or an event etc. is called the immediate cause.

The accumulated causes which are responsible for that are called non immediate causes.

E H Carr explains "The study of history is a study of causes (John, 2002)"

Immediate Cause: Normally the immediate cause of an event receives more attention than the causes which are actually responsible attention for the outbreak of the event. Such a cause is widely discussed. But the study of the immediate cause does not lead one to the root cause or its investigation. Infact everything is an outcome of something preceding that. A great historian, perhaps the great thinker should be the man always asking the question ...Why? About new things or contexts.

Herodotus, the father of history mentions in his work: to preserve a memory of the deeds of the Greek and the Barbarians (John, 2002).

Prof Gustavson describes it as a "Cause is a convenient figure of speech for any one of a number of factors which helped to explain why a historical event happened" (Gustavson, 1955)

Non-immediate Cause: These are the causes which are actually responsible for the outbreak of the event. Such a cause is widely discussed.

III. THEORIES ON CAUSATION

There are many theories on causation and each theory seems reasonable.

Let's go in detail into each theory and analyze its interpretation.

Divine Plan theory:

The supporters of this theory believe that the kings, heroes, priests and the elites of the society very significantly contribute to many happenings. Christian historians too had relied to it and according to them everything from a sparrow that fell to the earth to the falling of an empire, had a cause. But there are many events which are caused because God willed these to be caused. Thus they believe in the direct intervention of God in human affairs (Majumdar *et al.*,2001).These historians who fall under this class try to explain the cause of every event in their own way, but they fail to put forward a satisfactory explanation, they attribute to the will of God.

For a very long time this viewpoint was very popular because of the hold of religion and priestly class over the society. Every historian and philosopher who addressed himself to this problem started with the Flood, postulating for the new world and a later flood or a greater flood or a series of floods, all too, with new exceptions, took for granted that the mankind in every continent was descended from a common set of ancestors, Adam and Eve (Commager, 2015). Both in the East and in the West this theory remained popular and well accepted by other historians. But this theory is losing ground as how it is believed that every event has a cause and reason for its happening and thus cannot be left to God.

Rationalistic theory:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century there had been awakening among the people and during that period rationalism grew in the society. Several scholars, historians and thinkers abandoned the involvement of the supernatural and divine force as a causal explanation of the human development. They paid their attention on human beings and provided greater emphasis on the role of man (Majumdar *et al.*, 2001). John Locke says "the mutual love among men was the dominant characteristic of the dominant natural society and their civil institutions are derived from reasons and the desire to preserve their freedom, rights and privileges. The French philosopher said that 'the history was moving towards the human perfectibility through the steady accumulation of knowledge and triumph of reason' (Majumdar *et al.*, 2001). "The law of Nature" as well as of "Nature's God" was the Newtonian theory applied to men and their affairs and it had the immense advantage of making history not only a secular but a rational affair. Soon all the philosophers and historians were explaining history in terms of Nature and in one way or another this has persisted down to our own time (Commager, 2015).

Nationalistic Theory:

With the dawn of the nineteenth century more varied approaches to the problem of cause were adopted. This was a feeling of nationalism which found a social ground in the nineteenth century. Many wars and battles were fought due to the feeling of nationalism of the might nations for dominating over the weak nations. Though in the past there was feeling of nationalism in the states that fought each other to extend their boundaries of kingdoms. Besides this the national character and institutions also played an important role in the historical events (Khurana, 2010).

The natural characters are built as well as destroyed historically which established social, political and economic institutions.

Scientific theory:

In the nineteenth century there developed a school of historians headed by Ranke, who also proposed that history could be explained without the philosophy of causation. He argued that the best philosophy of history is not at all embracing the theory of causality, but a concentration of antecedents and consequents. But the team did not try to explain how one could find out from the mass of historical events that happened before and followed the historical happenings (Majumdar *et al.*, 2001).

Human Emotion theory:

Yet another view supported by Hegel, Comte, Simon emphasised that the human emotions were the chief moving force in human beings. They believed in succession of cultures, each born out of the ashes of their predecessor. They believed in the succession of the cultures and the rebirth out of the ashes of their predecessors. Thus Hegel holds that a new culture, a representative of the new spirit took place in the place of the old culture. They also emphasized that the emotions play a significant role in many important events. In the present scenario this can be seen with the political and religious leaders with strong personalities (Khurana, 2010).

It can be assumed that these powerful personalities in the society can change the way of old culture followed by the people.

Marxian Theory:

This theory was adopted by Karl Marx, who presented a materialistic interpretation of historical happenings. Karl Marx founded a school of history, and not of history alone, which interpreted most of the activities and ideas of men's interim economic with economic interests and forces. His theories had influenced the whole world and of which are being dominating in the society. Initially this materialistic theory was offered by Malthus, who emphasised the struggle for survival in the economic sphere. According to Karl Marx, the class who controlled the means of production dominates in the economic field. He argued that the existing struggle is only the class struggle and a few powerful persons dominate all the other classes in the economic, political and social standards (Khurana, 2010). Marx held that the struggle among the classes would ultimately end in the victory of the proletariat. Marx offered the chance of history under three heads, one it was not important but it could accelerate or slow down and radically alter the course of events. Secondly, one chance was compensated by another. So that in the end the chances cancels among themselves. Third, chance was especially illustrated in the character of individuals.

Historical School:

At the end of the nineteenth century a new historical school developed in Germany. Wilhelm Dithy, its chief spokesman claimed that history is a continuous process and it is the duty of a historian to find out the

causes of the events which have been happening in the different parts of the world. The scholars of this school emphasised that history should be a quest for values and a historian should make an effort to provide explanations and guidelines on the basis of his own views. They also added that in addition to this the historians should find out the causes of the events and present them before the people of the period. This school widened the scope for the value judgement (Khurana, 2010).

Pluralistic School:

The pluralistic school of historians rejected the idea that history was merely a chronicle of important events and the deeds of the prominent men with the description of the life of the monarchs or elites of the society. These historians insisted that history should deal with social, cultural, political and economic developments of the past and find out their causes. They emphasised that for the happening of every event in history, many causes were responsible rather than a single cause.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus it is evident that even though many theories on causation have been discussed, but the problem of historical causation is still unsolved and moreover confused. As the time flies on, new theories are likely to come forth on the problems of historical causation. The lines of Louis Gottschalk is proper at this juncture "Historians ought to use the word cause and even the word causes sparingly and instead, breaking the concept down into its component parts, to cultivate the more precise words impressive imprecise though they too may be such as purpose, occasion and antecedent means or motive whereas possible (Jayapalan, 2008)". Today's historians tend characteristically to combine generalization, narration and causation to a single explanatory model. But it is not self evident that the problems of causes are properly a part of the historian's work. Other historians have responded in a simple way. They have eliminated the word 'Cause' from their vocabulary and have continued to construct crypto casual interpretations. They have camouflaged causation behind words such as "influences, Impulses, Elements etc" All the synonyms in the Thesaurus has been used by the Historians, in their efforts to avoid an explanation form they distrust, but not have been able to discard (David Hackett, 1970). There are of course many modes of historical explanations which are noncausal in nature. Whether or not historians ought to do causal history, the plain fact is that almost all of them do it and some do it better than others Causation is an idea which is generally used because it is generally useful. Still other historians have assumed that a causal explanation is one that identifies "underlying conditions" which were of such a nature that they rendered the effect probable. This is perhaps the most common of all forms of causal explanation in historical scholarship. A specific type of causal explanation a historian employs must be selected according to the nature of the effect to be explained and the nature of the object of the explanation. Every causal explanation should be an explanation to some purpose. There is no such thing as the cause and no cause for all occasions (David Hackett, 1970). The most of the trouble the historians get themselves into in causal explanation consists in asking one kind of causal question but seeking another kind of causal answer or it consists in a stubborn determination to locate the cause. Accordingly both these problems are aggravated by the unfortunate tendency of historians to hide their causal models from everybody including themselves.

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